

About The Big Read

The Big Read is an initiative of the National Endowment for the Arts, designed to restore reading to the center of American culture. The NEA presents The Big Read in partnership with the Institute of Museum and Library Services and in cooperation with Arts Midwest. The Big Read brings together partners across the country to encourage reading for pleasure and enlightenment.

The Big Read answers a big need. [*Reading at Risk: A Survey of Literary Reading in America*](#), a 2004 report by the National Endowment for the Arts, found that not only is literary reading in America declining rapidly among all groups, but that the rate of decline has accelerated, especially among the young. The concerned citizen in search of good news about American literary culture would study the pages of this report in vain.

The Big Read aims to address this crisis squarely and effectively. It provides citizens with the opportunity to read and discuss a single book within their communities. The initiative includes innovative reading programs in selected cities and towns, comprehensive resources for discussing classic literature, an ambitious national publicity campaign, and an extensive Web site providing comprehensive information on authors and their works.

Each community event lasts approximately one month and includes a kick-off event to launch the program locally, ideally attended by the mayor and other local luminaries; major events devoted specifically to the book (panel discussions, author reading, and the like); events using the book as a point of departure (film screenings, theatrical readings, and so forth); and book discussions in diverse locations and aimed at a wide range of audiences.

The NEA inaugurated The Big Read as a pilot project in 2006 with ten communities featuring four books. The Big Read continues to expand to include more communities and additional books. By June 2010, more than 800 grants have been awarded to communities in the U.S. to host Big Reads since the program's 2007 national launch.

The Adventures of Tom Sawyer is not merely a literary classic. It is part of the American imagination. More than any other work in our culture it established America's vision of childhood. Mark Twain created two fictional boys, Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn, who still seem more real than most of the people we know. In a still puritanical nation, Twain reminded adults that children were not angels, but fellow human beings, and perhaps all the more lovable for their imperfections and bad grooming. Neither American literature nor America has ever been the same.

The Big Read is an initiative of the National Endowment for the Arts designed to revitalize the role of literary reading in American popular culture. *Reading at Risk: A Survey of Literary Reading in America*, a 2004 NEA report, identified a critical decline in reading for pleasure among American adults. The Big Read addresses this issue by bringing communities together to read, discuss, and celebrate books and writers from American and world literature.

A great book combines enlightenment with enchantment. It awakens our imagination and enlarges our humanity. It can even offer harrowing insights that somehow console and comfort us. Whether you're a regular reader already or making up for lost time, thank you for joining The Big Read.